

Message Text

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42

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 SCCT-01

TRSE-00 MC-02 /089 W

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P 232100Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0000

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USSOUTHCOM

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 4047

E.O. 11652: GDSH

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PINS, UR, CO

SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. VOTING IN THE APRIL 18 MID-TERM ELECTIONS, ALTHOUGH PREDICTABLY LIGHT, DEMONSTRATED BROAD POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES. PRESIDENT LOPEZ DELIVERED A MAJOR ADDRESS SHORTLY BEFORE THE ELECTIONS, TAKING A HARD LINE AGAINST EXTREME LEFTIST TERROR AND VIOLENCE AS THREATS TO COLOMBIAN INSTITUTIONS. ON THE DAY FOLLOWING THE ELECTIONS, TERRORISTS MURDERED KIDNAPPED LABOR LEADER MERCADO, WHOSE FUNERAL PROVIDED THE OCCASION FOR A MASSIVE POPULAR TURNOUT, WITH PROMINENT PARTICIPATION BY GOC LEADERS. COLOMBIAN CIVIL AIR OFFICIALS HAVE BECOME COOL TOWARD THE PROSPECT OF A YAK-40 PURCHASE FOLLOWING A TRIP TO THE USSR. PRESIDENT LOPEZ SIGNED INTO LAW A STATUTE REGULATING AND PROTECTING THE PRESS. END SUMMARY.

2. MID-TERM ELECTIONS. VOTING IN THE EASTER SUNDAY
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ELECTIONS WAS ORDERLY THROUGHOUT COLOMBIA. THE COINCIDENCE

OF THE ELECTIONS WITH THE EASTER HOLIDAY, COMBINED WITH THE CHRONIC LACK OF INTEREST IN THE MID-TERM VOTING (FOR MUNICIPAL AND DEPARTMENTAL ASSEMBLIES) TO PRODUCE A LOWER THAN USUAL TURNOUT, NOW ESTIMATED AT 30PCT. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, WITH NEARLY 40PCT OF THE VOTE, WAS THE BIG GAINER, UP FROM 31 PCT OF THE VOTE IN THE 1974 ELECTIONS. THE APRIL 14 DEATH OF FORMER PRESIDENT AND PARTY LEADER MARIANO OSPINA UNDOUBTEDLY ODOUGHT OUT ADDITIONAL CONSERVATIVE VOTERS. THE PARTY ALSO BENEFITTED FROM CONCERN ABOUT "LAW AND ORDER" AND FROM THEIR STATUS AS THE ONLY VIABLE POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE TO THE LIBERALS. ANAPO, WHICH A FEW YEARS AGO, WAS THE MAJOR OPPOSITION TO THE GOC, DREW ONLY 3.7PCT OF THE VOTE AND IS NO LONGER AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN COLOMBIA'S POLITICAL LIFE. FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY, STILL CLEARLY THE MAJORITY GROUP (52PCT OF THE VOTE) THE ELECTION ALSO SERVED TO TEST THE POPULARITY OF THE TWO LEADING CONTENDERS FOR THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION. NEITHER FORMER PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS NOR AMBASSADOR TURBAY WAS ABLE TO GAIN A CLEARCUT VICTORY AND MAY HAVE SUCCEEDED ONLY IN BLOCKING ONE ANOTHER. THE FAR LEFT, DESPITE IMPROVED FINANCING AND ORGANIZATION, MADE ONLY MODEST GAINS AND, WITH A 4.7PCT OF THE VOTE REMAINS A PERIPHERAL FACTOR ON THE ELECT HORAL SCENE. (BOGOTA 3975, 3979).

3. LOPEZ GETS TOUGH ON EXTREME LEFTISTS. FOUR DAYS BEFORE LOCAL ELECTIONS AND ON THE EVE OF A LONG EASTER WEEKEND, PRESIDENT LOPEZ DELIVERED A VIGOROUS TELEVISED ADDRESS TO THE NATION (BOGOTA 3835). HE DEFENDED HIS ADMINISTRATION'S STRICT SECURITY MEASURES AND RIDICULED CRITICISM FROM THE EXTREME LEFT. HE ALSO SCORED COMMUNIST-LED LABOR ORGANIZATIONS FOR CREATING DISORDER AND WARNED COLOMBIANS THAT THE LEADERS OF SUCH LABOR GROUPS WERE NOT WORKING IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THEIR RANK AND FILE. REFERRING TO THE EXTREME LEFT, LOPEZ CALLED UPON CITIZENS TO REJECT THOSE WHO WOULD SOW VIOLENCE AND ASKED VOTERS TO COME OUT IN FORCE TO SUPPORT COLOMBIAN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. THE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH WAS PART OF HIS NEW "GET TOUGH" POSTURE AND SIGNAL THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT TOLERATE DISORDERS.

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4. LABOR LEADER MERCADO SLAIN--RECEIVES HERO'S BURIAL. AS THEY HAD THREATENED, THE EXTREME-LEFTIST TERRORIST ORGANIZATION M-19 MURDERED LABOR LEADER JOSE MERCADO APRIL 19, AFTER HOLDING HIM CAPTIVE SINCE FEBRUARY 15 (BOGOTA 3040). A MASSIVE TURNOUT OF PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE AT HIS FUNERAL APRIL 21, WHICH THE GOC DECLARED A DAY OF NATIONAL MOURNING, INDICATES THAT THE M-19 MISCALCULATED AND BESTOWED ON MERCADO THE STATUS OF HERO AND MARTYR RATHER THAN THAT OF "ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE"

AS THEY INTENDED (BOGOTA 4018).

5. COLOMBIANS HESITANT TO BUY YAK-40 AIRCRAFT. A GOC CIVIL AVIATION (AEROCIVIL) TEAM RETURNED ON APRIL 17 FROM AN EIGHT-DAY VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION TO INSPECT THE YAK-40 AIRCRAFT. THE VISIT WAS A FOLLOW-UP TO THE DECEMBER 1975 GOC-USSR TRADE TALKS IN MOSCOW, AT WHICH THE POSSIBLE AEROCIVIL PURCHASE OF A YAK-40 WAS DISCUSSED. ACCORDING TO THE TEAM LEADER, THE TEAM WAS GENERALLY IMPRESSED WITH THE AIRCRAFT'S PERFORMANCE, BUT FOUND ITS RANGE TO BE VERY LIMITED. THE COLOMBIANS WERE NOT CONVINCED BY SOVIET PROMISES OF ADEQUATE MAINTENANCE FACILITIES AND SPARE PARTS SUPPLY, AND THEY STILL FORESEE PROBLEMS IN REPLACING THE YAK-40 INSTRUMENTATION WITH A SYSTEM COMPATIBLE WITH PRESENT COLOMBIAN OWNED U.S. MADE EQUIPMENT. THE SOVIETS ARE INSISTING THAT THE GOC COMMIT ITSELF TO PURCHASE BEFORE BRINGING THE AIRCRAFT TO COLOMBIA FOR TEST FLIGHTS, WHICH THE GOC IS UNWILLING TO DO. (REF IR 6819002676).

6. NEW PRESS LAW. ON APRIL 22 PRESIDENT LOPEZ SIGNED INTO LAW A PRESS STATUTE WHICH "RECOGNIZES, REGULATES AND PROTECTS THE EXERCISE OF JOURNALISM IN ANY OF ITS FORMS". THE LAW SET ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS WHICH DETERMINE WHO MAY PRACTICE JOURNALISM AND GUARANTEES FREEDOM OF INFORMATION, EXPRESSION, AND UNION ASSOCIATION. IN HIS REMARKS UPON SIGNING THE LAW, PRESIDENT LOPEZ CALLED ATTENTION TO THE DANGER TO DEMOCRACY POSED BY "THE SENSATIONALIST PRESS" AND USED THE EXAMPLES OF THE "NEW YORK TIMES" AND AND WASHINGTON POST TO ILLUSTRATE HIS THESIS.
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